STAR TREK™
ADVENTURES

A FOREST APART

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A FOREST APART

BY MARCO RAFALÀ

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01.10

A FOREST APART
SYNOPSIS

On the frontier of Federation space, the Player Characters encounter a vessel of unknown origin: a forested geodesic dome. The damaged craft appears to be well over 1,000 years old and foreign to the Milky Way Galaxy. It does not respond to hails and no intelligent life readings are detected.

When the Player Characters beam aboard, they discover a vast and ancient forest. Yet many of the gold-leafed, silver-barked trees are dead or dying. The Player Characters will soon learn that this is not just any forest. The trees are the last of their kind: a sentient species from the Large Magellanic Cloud. They are in desperate need of aid. But helping them will put the Player Characters' values to the test.

Killing the trees are small insectoids called the Jahan !Xu. A sentient species, they exist in hyper-accelerated time, making them invisible. They suffer from a neurodegenerative disease that has nearly wiped out their species. Only the sap of the sentient trees, to which they are addicted, slows its progression.

As the Player Characters investigate how to help both species, the geodesic dome suddenly sets course for Albali Prime. The Class-M planet harbors a peaceful, Bronze Age humanoid civilization. The Sentient Trees believe this is the mythical homeland foretold in their ancient tales. Since their distant sun died, they have travelled across galaxies in search of this place. They are not entirely wrong. Many millennia ago, before a biological war devastated the ecosystem, a space-faring civilization thrived on Albali Prime. Two of its astronauts crash-landed on the trees' world. One helped wake the trees to sentience, and the memories of his home world are with them still. On Albali Prime, in an isolated valley, the primitive people also carry a tale that one day trees will grow again.

Before the Players uncover these connections, they must first grapple with the non-interference doctrine. Are they willing to violate the Prime Directive to save two intelligent species on the edge of extinction? If so, at what cost? The fate of two alien races and the well-being of the Albali, a society still in its infancy, rests in the hands of the Players.

DIRECTIVES

While the Prime Directive is always in play for Starfleet officers, is it worth reminding the Player Characters of the non-interference doctrine at the start of this adventure.

- No interference with the normal development of alien cultures.

Other Directives for this mission include:

- Provide humanitarian aid to other warp-capable species.
- Respect the faiths and belief-systems of alien cultures.

The Gamemaster begins this mission with 2 points of Threat for every Player Character in the group.

ADAPTING THIS MISSION TO OTHER ERAS

This adventure can easily be played in other eras. For games set in *The Next Generation* era, if one of the Player Characters is a Betazoid, their empathic abilities may enable them to sense that there are sentient lifeforms within the forest. They will sense two types of lifeforms: one is dreaming in some sort of hibernation and the other is sick and desperate. The Betazoid will not be able to communicate telepathically, as neither species is empathic or telepathic. But it may lead the Player Characters to suspect that the trees are sentient earlier in the adventure.

If playing in the *Enterprise* era, Starfleet had not yet created the Prime Directive. Instead, this should be articulated as a mission Directive to not "play God" with other cultures. In addition, in Act 1, Scene 1, there would be no record of any Earth vessel's prior encounters with the galactic barrier. Further, there will not have been an earlier planetary survey of Albali Prime, as referenced in Acts 2 and 3. The Player Characters will instead need to learn the information by scanning the planet and interacting with its inhabitants.

01.20

A FOREST APART
ACT 1: THE GEODESIC DOME

"Captain's Log, Stardate 5929.4. Beyond the distant edge of Federation space, we discovered a derelict vessel – a forested geodesic dome – over one thousand years old and foreign to this Galaxy. Our instruments measure no intelligent life-readings and yet, the vessel contains a breathable atmosphere. All hails and friendship messages have gone unanswered. Who built this craft, and what became of its crew? I intend to find out."

SCENE 1: THE GEODESIC DOME

The Player Characters are in a remote sector of the Galaxy, beyond the outer rim of Federation space. They have spent the last month mapping star systems, globular clusters, and stellar phenomena. During that time, they haven't discovered even one class-M planet, not one new lifeform. To say that it has been a quiet month for the crew is an understatement.

All that changes when they come upon an alien vessel of unknown origin, adrift among the stars. Though disabled, it generates a fluctuating bioenergetic field. Preliminary sensor readings show a breathable atmosphere, but no intelligent lifeforms aboard.

THE BRIEFING ROOM

The Player Characters sit around a conference table with a tri-screen viewer displaying basic information about the object from initial sensor scans. The alien vessel is organic in nature. The craft is 10 kilometers in diameter. It possesses no known weapons systems. There are no docking ports or hatches. An ancient ruin lies at the heart of the forested dome. Analysis of the hull indicates the vessel is over 1,000 years old and trajectory analysis indicates it came from outside the Milky Way Galaxy.

On the wall viewer, the alien vessel fills the screen. The dome is transparent and covered in a hexagon of vines. A forest of golden-leafed, silver-barked trees fills the geodesic dome. Solar sails attach to the support frame beneath the dome, swept back like the wings of a majestic bird. The frame tapers into a massive root system. Increased magnifications show that the forest is sick. Curiously, there is a ring of healthy trees at the heart of the forest within the ruins.

Using the inset computer terminal, the Science Officer may conduct an analysis of the ship's sensor readings. This is a **Reason + Sciences** Task, assisted by the ship's **Sensors + Sciences** with a Difficulty of 2. Success reveals:

- The bioelectric field is strongest at the heart of the forested dome. This highly charged field floods the area with negative ions, scrambling sensors.

Spending Momentum to *Obtain Information* further reveals:

- The geodesic dome utilizes biological computing. Its organic technology possesses remarkable regenerative systems. The vessel is currently repairing itself.

The Captain may ask his Science Officer if this organic vessel could be a sentient being. Answering this question requires a deeper analysis. This is a **Reason + Science** Task, assisted by the ship's **Computers + Science**, with a Difficulty of 0. No roll is required. The Task is automatically successful with zero successes. However, the Player may roll if he wishes to generate **Momentum**. In that case, add two points to the Threat Pool for any Complications that occur. Success reveals:

- The biology of the geodesic dome is non-intelligent, and comparable to plants.

Should the Player Characters question how the vessel survived such a perilous journey, they can cross reference the data with their ship's library computer. Doing this confirms that damage to the alien craft is consistent with Captain James T. Kirk's account of the *U.S.S. Enterprise*'s encounter with the galactic barrier on Stardate 1312.9. This is a Difficulty 0 Task using **Insight + Science**, assisted by the ship's **Computers + Science**. As above, the Player may roll to generate Momentum.

The Chief Engineer may attempt to understand the alien vessel's design and propulsion systems. This is an **Insight + Engineering** Task, assisted by the ship's **Computers + Engineering** with a Difficulty of 1. Success reveals:

- The solar sails appear to be the vessel's only method of propulsion. It has no faster-than-light capabilities that instruments can detect.

- The alien vessel uses a biodigester to convert plant matter into fuel.

Spending Momentum to *Obtain Information* reveals the following:

- Just as plants and other organisms use sunlight to synthesize food, the dome itself appears to be designed for photosynthesis. It converts light energy into chemical energy as an additional fuel source.

Their analysis of the vessel so far suggests even more questions. Where did it come from? What is its purpose? Is this a ghost ship with a long-dead crew, or is there intelligent life aboard, a totally new alien lifeform unrecognizable to Starfleet instruments? To find answers, they will need to board the alien vessel.

BEAMING TO THE GEODESIC DOME

Because the transporter cannot penetrate the ion disturbance surrounding the ancient ruins, the Player Characters must beam aboard near the outer edge of the forest. Since the alien vessel does not have a transporter pad, the Difficulty for this task increases by 1. This a **Control + Engineering** Task, assisted by the ship's **Sensors + Engineering**, with a Difficulty of 3. This Task Succeeds at Cost, adding two points to the Threat Pool.

Complications increase the Difficulty of future Tasks that use the transporter by 1, representing interference from the bioelectric field.

SCENE 2: THE GARDENERS

The Player Characters materialize in a clearing in a vast forest. A chorus of insect noises surrounds them. Strange, since ship sensors and their own tricorders register no animal life. Taller than Earth's Redwood Forest, the ancient trees appear sickly, with many already dead. Golden leaves, the size of an open hand, litter the ground. The trees' smooth, silver-blue bark is peeling. Holes from wood-boring pests pockmark the trunks, oozing a sticky, yellow sap.

Large flowering plants with tall purple stalks grow at the base of the trees. A seedpod the size of an adult human sprouts from each plant. But the flowers and pods around the dead trees have withered.

The geodesic dome has the following Location Trait: Electronic Interference 2. This trait increases the Difficulty of Tasks that use tricorders and other electronic equipment by 2. The trait remains active for as long the Player Characters are aboard the alien vessel.

A tricorder analysis of the trees is a **Reason + Science** or **Medicine** Task with a Difficulty of 2. Success reveals:

- The sick trees are losing their sap at an alarming rate but, if wood-boring pests are responsible, they are not present.

Spending Momentum to *Obtain Information* reveals, point for point:

- The trees are generating the bioelectric field. With the forest dying, that field is weakening.
- Current projections indicate that at the rate the trees are losing their sap, the forest has only days before it dies out.

Tricorders are unable to penetrate the flowering seedpods.

At this point, the purple stalks of the flowering plants begin swaying back and forth. The felt-like tips strike a pattern on the petals. Each produces a musical note, reminiscent of the hammered dulcimer.

The larger seedpods slowly open. Inside are the Gardeners. Their humanoid bodies are a connection of interlocking leaves and thick, gnarled vines. The tops of their heads taper into twisting, flowering branches. Each flower has its own little purple stalks. The Gardeners have no mouths with which to speak or eat.

The Gardeners ignore the Player Characters and stand as if waiting for instructions. The music changes and a group of Gardeners hurry toward the ruins at the center of the dome. The music changes again and the remaining Gardeners proceed to a small shed made of vines and leaves. The flowers on the head of one of the Gardeners plays an accompaniment to the music of the forest and the shed door's interlocking vines release. The Gardener steps inside and hands stone tools to the others. Together, they begin tending to the forest.

For the moment, the Player Characters can move freely about the geodesic dome. But the Gardeners will not ignore the Player Characters for long.

Taking tricorder readings of the Gardeners is a **Reason + Science** or **Medicine** Task with a Difficulty of 2. Success reveals:

- The humanoids are a botanical life-form.

With the seedpods open, a tricorder scan becomes possible. This is a **Reason + Science** Task with a Difficulty of 2. Success reveals:

- The seedpods act as both birthing and stasis chambers for these lifeforms.

Spending Momentum to *Obtain Information* reveals:

- The seedpods are a bioelectric interface, requiring an organic component to function.

Any attempt to integrate a communicator or universal translator with the seedpod's embryonic shoot is a **Daring + Engineering** or **Science** Task with a Difficulty of 4. Success produces nothing more than heavy electric squawks and static. These lifeforms simply do not have a language as we understand it. See **Observing the Botanical Lifeforms** and **Modifications to the Universal Translator** below for additional information.

OBSERVING THE BOTANICAL LIFEFORMS

Observing the behavior of the Gardeners as it relates to the music produced by the flowers might provide some valuable insights. It may be beneficial for the Player Character who makes the attempt to have a Focus in Botany. Those who wish to assist may benefit from a Focus in Xenolinguistics. This is an **Insight + Science** Task with a Difficulty of 2. Success reveals:

- The tricorder does not register any sound waves. According to readings, there is no music.

If the Player spends Momentum to *Obtain Information*, the tricorder detects strange chemical compounds in the air. A simple analysis of the chemical compounds will show that they are harmless.

A deeper analysis requires a **Reason + Science** or **Medicine** Task with a Difficulty of 3. Success reveals:

- The music the Player Characters hear is a chemical reaction inside their brains caused by chemical compounds the flowers release when their petals are struck. The botanical lifeforms feel the messages relayed by these compounds. The Player Characters interpret them as audio tones when they breathe in and absorb the compounds via their mucous membranes.

At this point, they will have sufficient information to know that the Universal Translator will not be helpful. Its design interprets brainwaves of humanoids and their languages. In appearance, the Gardeners may look humanoid but they are not. As botanical lifeforms, they do not have neurons, synapses, or brains as we understand them. They have no oral or tactile language – no recognizable brainwave patterns – for the translation matrix to decipher. The botanical lifeforms use a more primal mode of communication, more like transmitting intuition and genetic memory than communicating a thought. This species is unlike anything Starfleet has encountered before.

Player Characters will need to find other ways to communicate with the botanical lifeforms. The bioelectric interface of the seedpods, for example, might be the answer. But that comes with unknown risks and could forever alter one who steps inside. See **The Seedpod** in Scene 3.

A Vulcan might suggest communicating with one of the Gardeners through a Mind-Meld, but the forest will perceive this as a hostile act. If attempted, the music of the forest ceases and the Gardeners stop to look at the Player Characters. Proceed to **The Forest Awakens** encounter in Scene 3. For additional information, see the Vulcan Mind-Meld sidebar on page 007.

THE GARDENERS [MINOR NPC]

TRAITS: Botanical Humanoid Life-form, Mute

ATTRIBUTES

CONTROL 08	FITNESS 09	PRESENCE 07
DARING 09	INSIGHT 07	REASON 08

DISCIPLINES

COMMAND 00	SECURITY 02	SCIENCE 01
CONN 00	ENGINEERING 02	MEDICINE 01

STRESS: 11 **RESISTANCE:** 3

WEAPONS:

- Unarmed Strike (Melee, 3, Knockdown, Size 1H, Non-lethal)

SPECIAL RULES:

- **The Song of the Forest:** Gardeners are an extension of the Sentient Trees. They communicate via an airborne chemical compound that non-botanical lifeforms perceive as music. When the Gardeners release twice the amount of chemicals, this can become painful for non-botanical life forms. This inflicts 6[CD] Non-lethal damage. If Effects are rolled, then the Players are knocked prone as in Knockdown.

- **Vine Entanglement:** On a successful Melee Attack, spend Threat to create the Vine Entanglement Complication. This Complication immobilizes the target. It prevents them from taking any action, including trying to break free.

MODIFICATIONS TO THE UNIVERSAL TRANSLATOR

While this adventure operates under the assumption that the translation matrix cannot be modified – that these botanical lifeforms are simply too alien – the Players may wish to make the attempt anyway in a desperate bid at communication. After all, making the impossible possible is as much a part of *Star Trek* as warp drive and strange new worlds. If this is their intention, follow them on their course. The attempt should be daunting. Consider an Extended Task or Gated Challenge, or even the rules for the Scientific Method, for these botanical lifeforms communicate in such a way that is truly unique in the experience of Starfleet. Impress upon the Players just how difficult a Task they have set for themselves. This isn't something that can be accomplished with just a tricorder. At least one among them will need to return to their vessel and make use of its vast array of laboratories and equipment. Gamemasters might need to make significant changes to the adventure, but success here will be nothing short of extraordinary for the Player Characters, a breakthrough in linguacode translation technology.

SCENE 3: TO THE RUINS

As the Player Characters move toward the heart of the forest, they enter an area of extreme deforestation. Several trees have fallen, making passage more difficult. No Gardeners work here, as there are so few surviving trees.

THE SEEDLING

In this stretch of heavily damaged forest, the Player Characters' passage disrupts an unsteady nurse log. A young seedling growing in the log is knocked to the ground. Half a meter tall, the seedling will most likely die without aid. Will the Player Characters replant the seedling or continue on their way?

The Player Characters will feel the repercussions of this choice later in the adventure. See **Encounter: Judgment of the First Tree** in Act 2.

THE BURIAL MOUND

As the Player Characters leave the deforested area, the Gardeners' hum of activity resumes around them. In a grassy clearing, a spiral-carved standing stone marks a burial mound 2 meters high and 3 meters in diameter. The burial mound's door is made of white flowering vines, with no visible opening mechanism.

Recognizing the burial mound for what it is requires an Observation Task. This Task could use **Insight** or **Reason + Science**. The **Engineering** Discipline might also be appropriate since burial mounds are a primitive feat of engineering.

An examination of the standing stone is a **Reason + Science** Task with a Difficulty of 2. Success reveals:

- The stone is older than the geodesic dome by 10,000 years.

Spending Momentum to *Obtain Information*, reveals:

- The engravings appear to represent two spiral galaxies, and may have some mythological significance.

If the Player Characters recognize the mound as a place of interment, they may decide not to violate it. If so, make note of this fact. That decision creates an Advantage for the Social Conflict with the First Tree. See **Judgment of the First Tree** in Act 2.

The Player Characters may attempt to enter in the same way the Gardeners opened the shed. Deciphering the correct chemical compounds to release from the flowers is a difficult Task. It requires a cross analysis of the tricorder readings taken earlier. This is a **Daring + Science** Task. Due to the electronic interference, the Difficulty is increased to 4.

If they never discovered the chemical compounds and the role those compounds play in the plant-based communication, then their options are limited. Any attempt to synthesize the melody using a tricorder or other device will have no effect. Using phasers to cut through the vines will be seen as an attack by the forest; proceed immediately to **The Forest Awakens** encounter.

The Player Characters might also attempt to remember or make an educated guess as to the pattern used to open the shed door. This could be a **Reason + Engineering** or **Science** Task, an **Insight + Engineering** or even an **Insight + Science** task. The Difficulty is 3.

A success at either approach means the Player Characters know what petals to touch in what order to open the door. When this happens, they hear a melody and the door opens. But then the melody of the forest stops. The Gardeners cease working and slowly turn to watch the Player Characters, as if seeing them for the first time.

Inside the burial mound rests an organically constructed sarcophagus covered in white flowers. An examination is a **Reason + Science** Task with a Difficulty of 2. Success reveals:

- Within the sarcophagus is the mummified corpse of a non-botanical life-form, a humanoid. The tricorder dates the remains back to roughly the same time period the standing stone was erected.

ENCOUNTER: THE FOREST AWAKENS

The Sentient Trees have been in hibernation for more than 100 years while they directed all energy into repairing the geodesic dome. The damage caused by passing through the Great Barrier was nearly catastrophic. The Sentient Trees awaken to discover that the forest is dying, invaded by both wood-boring insects and non-botanical humanoid lifeforms. The trees surmise that, most likely, the two events are connected and the humanoids are to blame.

After the Player Characters have studied the sarcophagus (or, if they did not enter the burial mound, after they have moved on toward the ruins), the forest erupts into a new song. This time, the music is unbearably loud and the Player Characters are struck with terrible headaches. They may drop to their knees from the pain (see Sentient Trees special rules for The Song of the Forest).

Unknown to the Starfleet officers, the trees are attempting to communicate with them. The forest has never spoken in this way with another species before, however, and they quickly learn that their form of communication is incompatible with non-botanical life.

The pain in the Player Characters' heads lets up just as suddenly as it began, and the Gardeners advance. Spend Threat to bring in Reinforcements as the forest overwhelms the Player Characters. Gardeners are Minor NPCs, so the cost is one Threat apiece. But their attack is non-lethal. Players can determine this with an **Insight + Security** Task with a Difficulty of 0.

If the Player Characters put away their weapons and leave the burial mound the combat ends. One of the Gardeners takes a random Player Character by the hand and leads them to an open seedpod. The Gardener motions for the Player Character to get inside. If the Player Character does not comply, more Gardeners arrive to force the officer in with a successful Melee Attack.

If the Player Characters continue fighting and do not leave the burial mound, the combat will end when the Gardeners successfully entangle the Player Characters. At that point, they will select one at random and carry him off to a nearby seedpod.

If more than half the Gardeners are stunned, or otherwise knocked out of the combat, the rest will disengage and retreat into the forest.

THE SEEDPOD

The seedpod closes when one of the Starfleet officers gets inside, willingly or not. Once inside, the Sentient Trees attempt to link with that person the way they would link with the Gardeners. A thin, embryonic shoot painlessly enters at the base of the officer's head and connects with their central nervous system. While painless, this process would make all but a stoic Vulcan squirm at the tingling sensation.

This attempt at communication is similar to a Mind-Meld. For the Sentient Trees, this is an **Insight + Security** Task with a Difficulty of 1. An unwilling participant may resist with an Opposed Task. This is a **Fitness + Security** task with a Difficulty of 3. Allow the Player to suggest an Attribute and Discipline combination that better fits the character's approach to the situation. Complications will result in 4[CD] damage. A successful Opposed Task damages the seedpod. The pod opens and quickly withers. The music of the forest changes, and the Gardeners attack.

If the Sentient Trees are successful, then they now control the Player Character's speech and actions. But the forest cannot read the Player Character's mind. The Player Character can speak his or her own words, if the Sentient Trees allow it.

The thin shoot retracts from the base of the Player Character's head and the pod opens. The music of the forest

VULCAN MIND-MELD

Should a Vulcan Player Character initiate a Mind-Meld with a Gardener, the Difficulty for this Task is 3. As stated elsewhere, this will initiate a combat encounter. The Player may attempt the Mind-Meld so long as he is protected. For the Task, use the Attribute and Discipline that best describes the Player's approach, purpose, and intent.

Consider the Gardener an unwilling participant, and spend two points of Threat to create an Advantage. The Gardener will root himself firmly into the soil. These roots join with the root system of the Sentient Trees. Using 1d20, the Tree assists the Opposed Task with a **Fitness + Security** roll. The Difficulty is 2. The Gardener's Task also uses **Fitness + Security**, with the same Difficulty. If the Opposed Task succeeds, then the Mind-Meld is severed. The combat encounter continues until its natural conclusion.

A successful Mind-Meld links the Vulcan's mind to the forest. The Vulcan Player Character becomes aware of the Sentient Trees. The Player Character feels great pain and loneliness. See **The Seedpod** for the message the Sentient Trees convey through this joining of minds.

The Player may spend Momentum for a deeper telepathic exchange. In this case, the Vulcan will learn about the destruction of their solar system, the First Tree, and their long journey in search of a new home foretold in their ancient myths (see **The World They Left Behind)**.

Complications from the Mind-Meld will result in disorientation and the possible loss of a turn if the situation turned hostile.

changes. The Player Character steps out and speaks:

"I am the oldest in the Cycle from the First. What you see is all that remains of a once vast and beautiful forest, the last of our kind. You invade our ark, murder us, demons from the void, parasites all. Even now your servants continue to harvest our spirit. We feel them burrowing ever deeper for our life force. There is a word for this in your barbarian tongue: genocide."

The Player Characters are innocent, of course, and they will no doubt say as much. This is a Difficulty 5 Persuasion Task. The Sentient Trees are suspicious, and with good reason. They are dying at the hands of an unknown, alien intruder. Their suspicion increases the Difficulty by 2. With the Difficulty over 5, the Task becomes impossible. The Sentient Trees demand that the Player Characters deliver proof of their innocence to the First Tree.

At that moment, the Player Characters will receive a message from their starship. Systems aboard the geodesic dome are starting to come online. The dome has raised shields, preventing use of the transporters.

The Player Character controlled by the Sentient Trees speaks again:

"This Interface will now accompany you and observe."

This person, called the Interface, and the forest are slowly becoming one. Over time, this connection will grow stronger. There is a chance that it might become permanent unless the Player Characters can devise a way of disconnecting the pathways without irreversibly damaging the nervous system (see **The Fate of the Interface**).

The Player should know this danger ahead of time before having his or her character step into the seedpod. Some Players will appreciate the storytelling potential this provides. Gamemasters should know their groups, however, and suggest use of a Supporting Character if that is preferable.

SENTIENT TREES [MAJOR NPC]

TRAITS: Botanical Life-form, Skeptical, Unwavering Faith

VALUES:

- Preserve the Forest
- Find and Settle the Home Promised Us in the Great Cycle
- We Will Die Before Allowing Others to Put an Axe to Us
- There is a Better World, One Where All Creatures Exist in Harmony

ATTRIBUTES

CONTROL 10	FITNESS 08	PRESENCE 08
DARING 10	INSIGHT 10	REASON 10

DISCIPLINES

COMMAND 03	SECURITY 02	SCIENCE 03
CONN 02	ENGINEERING 03	MEDICINE 01

FOCUSES: Biological Technology, Photosynthesis

STRESS: 10 **RESISTANCE:** 4

WEAPONS:

- Bough Strike (Melee, 4, Knockdown, Size 1H)

SPECIAL RULES:

- **The Song of the Forest:** The Sentient Trees communicate via an airborne chemical compound that non-botanical lifeforms perceive as music. When the Sentient Trees release twice the amount of chemicals, this can become painful for non-botanical lifeforms. This inflicts 6CD Non-lethal damage. If Effects are rolled, then the Players are knocked prone as in Knockdown.
- **Extraordinary Insight 2:** The Sentient Tree gains two automatic successes on all Tasks using Insight in addition to any successes generated by rolling.
- **Threatening 6:** The Gardeners are of the trees and the trees are of the forest. They are one. This makes the Sentient Trees a formidable opponent. They begin each scene with 10 Threat that may only be used to benefit themselves. These points are not drawn from the normal Threat Pool.
- **Bitter Chemical Compounds:** Whenever performing a **Security** Task, spend 1 Threat to release a chemical compound into the air, which inflicts 3, Non-lethal damage.

01.30

A FOREST APART
ACT 2: THE GARDENERS

SCENE 1: AMONG TREES AND STONES

The Interface leads the Player Characters to the heart of the forest and the ruins there. The Gardeners follow at a short yet menacing distance.

If the Player Characters are not able to communicate with the Sentient Trees, either through a Vulcan Mind-Meld or the incident with the seedpod, the Gardeners will still herd them toward the ruins. The Gardeners' aim will be to deliver the Player Characters to the First Tree for judgment (see **Encounter: Judgment of the First Tree**).

The heart of the geodesic dome is where the bioelectric field is strongest. Upon entering, the air feels charged with static. The forest here is healthy, with no visible evidence that the wood-boring pests infested any of the trees here.

An analysis of the area is a **Reason + Science** Task with a Difficulty of 2. Success reveals:

- The highly-charged bioelectric field has flooded the area with negative ions and, as a result, ozone has built up in the air. These negative ions are not harmful.
- Intermittent life sign readings appear as blips or sensor ghosts for brief moments.

Spending Momentum to *Obtain Information* reveals, point for point:

- The negative ions are somehow protecting the trees within the bioelectric field.
- The sensor blips are lifeforms that exist in a state of hyper-acceleration. In normal time, these aliens are invisible to instruments and people, perceptible only as a hum of insects. Exposure to negative ions slows down their physiology and renders them visible. They appear and disappear in a flicker until their bodies adjust to normal time.

THE STOWAWAYS

Several of the Gardeners veer away and begin stomping at the ground just inside the bioelectric field. A chorus of clicking rises from the forest floor. The Gardeners are squashing insects, presumably the wood-boring pests. The creatures are seven centimetres long, four-armed and multi-legged. They have arched exoskeletons and two antennae that swoop back almost to the very end of their bodies. Pairs of sharp teeth in circular mouths protract and retract below compound, crescent-shaped eyes.

Contrary to appearances, these stowaways are an intelligent, sentient species. They speak a complex language that uses clicks as phonemes. Just as the Gardeners are about to kill the last of the creatures here, the Universal Translator translates the words: "*Help me*."

What the characters do upon discovery of the Jahan !Xu will factor into their encounter with the First Tree. The Players could argue with the Interface that sparing the insect's life is vital if they are to prove their innocence. This is a Difficulty 3 Persuasion Task. A failure should Succeed at Cost, creating a Complication that increases the Difficulty by 1 for the Persuasion Task during the **Judgment of the First Tree**.

Examining the Jahan !Xu with a medical tricorder is a **Reason + Medicine** Task with a Difficulty of 2. Success reveals:

- The aliens have been consuming the tree sap and display symptoms of addiction and withdrawal.
- They are also suffering from a neurodegenerative disease.

THE JAHAN !XU

The Jahan !Xu originate from an asteroid field at the fringes of our galaxy. They can exist in both the vacuum of space and most atmospheres. Generations ago, a neurodegenerative disease brought their race to the edge of extinction. Those who had not yet shown symptoms of the illness fled the colony and wandered the depths of space in search of a new home. But they still carried the disease and soon began to die. As luck would have it, they found the geodesic dome not long after those first few deaths. The dome was adrift, wounded from its passage through the Great Barrier. Burrowing through the roots on the underside, the Jahan !Xu boarded the vessel. They soon discovered that the tree sap slowed the progression of their disease. Their new colony aboard the dome flourished, doubling in size. The sap saved them from extinction, but not without a price. The Jahan !Xu are now addicted to the sap and its opioid-like effects. But harvesting the sap is a death sentence for the forest. Ultimately, if the forest dies, what will become of the Jahan !Xu?

Spending Momentum to *Obtain Information* further reveals:

- The tree sap acts like an opioid but also slows the progression of the neurodegenerative disease. Without the sap, the aliens will die.

To learn more about the disease and addiction, and discover any possible treatment, the Player Characters will need the facilities of their sickbay and medical laboratories. At this stage in the adventure, however, they are unable to use the transporter because of the dome's shields. This adds urgency to negotiations with both the Jahan !Xu and the First Tree.

In the interim, the Players might consider convincing the Jahan !Xu to stop consuming the tree sap. A doctor among the crew may warn against this course of action without access to their sickbay. Withdrawal can be dangerous, even life threatening. Should the Players move ahead with this plan, it will be difficult but not impossible. The Jahan !Xu know that the trees are dying because of them, and without the trees they will also perish. But their judgment is impaired by their addiction. In game terms, their addiction is a Complication. It increases the Difficulty by 1 in any Social Conflict. The Player Characters will need to persuade the stowaways that they can find a cure, and ease the suffering of their withdrawal symptoms. This is a Difficulty 4 Persuasion Task.

JAHAN !XU [MINOR NPC]

TRAITS: Insectoid Life-form, Addiction

ATTRIBUTES

CONTROL 07	FITNESS 09	PRESENCE 08
DARING 09	INSIGHT 08	REASON 07

DISCIPLINES

COMMAND 02	SECURITY 02	SCIENCE 00
CONN 01	ENGINEERING 01	MEDICINE 00

STRESS: 11 **RESISTANCE:** 1

WEAPONS:

- Bite (Melee, 2A, Intense)

SPECIAL RULES:

- **Hyper-acceleration:** In their natural state, the Jahan !Xu are invisible to those who exist in normal time. While in this state, no instrument can detect their life-signs. Negative ions slow their physiology down to normal time. compound into the air, which inflicts 3A, Non-lethal damage.

If the Persuasion Task is successful, the Jahan !Xu stop harvesting the tree sap. This creates an Advantage for the Player Characters in their interaction with the Sentient Trees. It overcomes the skepticism of the forest and makes the Persuasion Task to prove their innocence possible. Once the Jahan !Xu stop ingesting the sap, they begin suffering from withdrawal symptoms in Scene 2.

Another scenario might see the Player Characters devising a way to flood the geodesic dome with negative ions. With only their standard issue equipment available, they will need to jury-rig a device. This requires a **Daring + Engineering** Task with a Difficulty of 4. Success forces the stowaways into normal time. The Jahan !Xu will be visible, and sensors will be able to detect them. Once visible, the Gardeners begin to kill the stowaways unless the Player Characters can convince the Sentient Trees otherwise. One way to stop the slaughter is if the Player Characters offer to beam the entire colony to their vessel (see **Judgment of the First Tree**). The colony consists of hundreds of Jahan !Xu so the Player Characters will need to convert a cargo bay as a temporary shelter for them.

THE RUINS

The crumbling ruin is shrouded in dense foliage and almost completely covered by the forest canopy. A massive tangle of roots and vines envelops the stonework. Trees twist and entwine themselves into cracks and grow around the structure.

In the central courtyard of an ancient temple, an enormous tree grows. This is the First Tree. At 116 meters, it reaches heights far beyond those of its brethren. Its mammoth trunk measures 12 meters in diameter. A tricorder's DNA analysis confirms that this is a single tree, approximately 10,000 years old. But that isn't even the most fascinating aspect about the First Tree. On its trunk is a humanoid face and the fingers of one hand, curled and grasping at nothing. Dark, wavy lines in the bark splay out like hair.

When the Player Characters arrive, the First Tree wakes from its hibernation. The eyes of the face in the tree open and blink. But its mouth never moves. The music of the forest changes. The Interface's head tilts to one side, as if listening to the music.

ENCOUNTER: JUDGMENT OF THE FIRST TREE

The Player Characters must now attempt to persuade the First Tree of their innocence. This will be possible, though still challenging, only if they have created an Advantage as described above or taken some other action to overcome the Sentient Trees' skepticism. This is a Difficulty 5 Persuasion Task. But past actions will affect the difficulty level:

- If the Player Characters replanted or otherwise saved the seedling in Act 1, Scene 2, reduce the Difficulty by 1.
- If the Player Characters did not enter the burial mound, thus avoiding the combat that ensued, reduce the Difficulty by 1.
- If the Player Characters Succeeded at Cost while convincing the Interface to spare the life of the Jahan !Xu, increase the Difficulty by 1.
- If the Player Characters have worked to strengthen the bioelectric field or flood the dome with negative ions, reduce the Difficulty by 1.
- If the Player Characters offered to beam the Jahan !Xu to their vessel, reduce the Difficulty by 1.

The Player Characters may spend one point of Determination if one of their Values applies to the situation. Examples of Values that might be appropriate are those that emphasize honesty or compassion, such as "A Responsibility to the Truth" or "Driven to Ease Suffering."

If the Persuasion Task is successful, then the music of the forest changes and the First Tree speaks through the Interface:

"I have told my children that you are not the cause of our sorrows. Indeed, you may yet be a cause for celebration if your deeds are equal to your lofty promises. Our long and difficult journey is near an end. I have located the island promised us in the Great Cycle. We have found our new home at last. Soon, our repairs will be complete and we shall bury our roots deep into new soil. But our time grows short, and the distance remains vast. We ask for your aid in completing our journey."

The Player Characters may freely ask the First Tree about the forest's origins and destination. For answers, see **The World They Left Behind**. If the Player Characters ask how they can assist the Sentient Trees, the First Tree will request aid in increasing the energy available to power and repair the dome's superluminal motion. The concept that this vessel possesses a faster-than-light propulsion system may baffle the Player Characters. There are no engines, no reactor of any kind, no means to generate a subspace field to achieve warp speeds. It's a mystery the First Tree will not answer to their satisfaction. If questioned, the First Tree will only say that the cosmic ocean has many currents. It takes an enormous amount of power to ride the fastest tidal motions.

If the Player Characters ask for a small sample of the Sentient Trees' sap for analysis to help in synthesizing medicine for the Jahan !Xu, then a Gardener approaches with a biodegradable vial holding the sample. This creates an Advantage for the medical treatment in Act 3 (see **Curing the Jahan !Xu**).

THE WORLD THEY LEFT BEHIND

The home world of the Sentient Trees, Shahana, is located in the Large Magellanic Cloud, a dwarf galaxy 160,000 light years from our own. However, the trees were not the first sentient beings to evolve on that planet. Millennia ago, Shahana was once home to a humanoid species that reached a level of development similar to Earth's Aztecs. This civilization cleared forests to make way for their cities and temples. When the humanoids died out for unknown reasons, they left behind only ruins and, at a genetic level within the trees, a deep distrust of non-botanical lifeforms.

Thousands of years later, two astronauts crash-landed on the planet at a moment when the trees were just beginning to evolve to sentience. One of the astronauts was killed in the crash; his mummified remains can be found in the burial mound. The surviving astronaut, however, was injured and sat down to rest at the foot of a young tree that, unbeknownst to him, was awakening to self-awareness. He leaned against the trunk and accepted that he would soon die from his injuries. Like a curious child picking up a toy to put in its mouth, the tree sent a shoot into the base of the astronaut's neck and connected directly with his consciousness. The two beings' thoughts and minds became one. And so the First Tree was born.

This led to huge leaps forward in evolution in the millennia that followed. The astronaut's memories of home—and his people that worshipped trees as the source of all life—created a mythology within the Sentient Trees, which they called "The Great Cycle."

As their sun began to die, the trees realized they needed to leave their planet or die with it. They built a ship and sent a colony of trees into the stars to find their promised land: the astronaut's home.

The Player Characters will then receive a call from their ship. The geodesic dome has lowered its shields and begun to move. Its course will take it to Albali Prime, in a binary star system one month away at sub-light speed. But the forest will not survive long enough to complete that journey. Complicating matters, a 10-year-old Starfleet planetary survey indicates Albali Prime is inhabited by a Bronze Age humanoid civilization.

If the Persuasion Task was not successful then the First Tree passes judgment:

"Strangers from across the glittering, black sea, it is the judgment of the First that you shall be composted for your crimes. You will become fuel for the ark and food for the forest."

The First Tree then announces that their journey is near an end as above, though it does not ask for aid.

If the First Tree's judgment goes against the Player Characters, then they have limited options. For example, they may force the forest to divert its resources to protect the First Tree by counteracting the negative ions. This would bring the Jahan !Xu into the ruins and endanger the First Tree – and the shields would fall. Jury-rigging a device to do this is a **Daring + Engineering** Task with a Difficulty of 3. The Player Characters should describe the function of the device. Is it flooding the area with positive ions or is it interfering with the bioelectric field? The Players will have to get creative in their solution.

Another option might be for a Vulcan Player Character to use a mind-meld to gain control of the geodesic dome. The Player would need to spend Momentum to gain the type of deep, telepathic access required. Such a violation will be difficult and dangerous. Increase the Complication range by 3. A successful mind-meld enables the Player Character to lower the geodesic dome's shield. This would allow them the use of their ship's transporter. A Vulcan would not be able to maintain the link for long. Spend 2 Threat to create a Complication that severs the mind-meld.

SCENE 2: THE COURSE IS SET

This scene assumes that the Player Characters successfully proved their innocence, and convinced the Jahan !Xu to stop harvesting the tree sap. With the geodesic dome's shields down, the crew can beam one or more Jahan !Xu to their vessel and attempt a remedy. But time is of the essence. The Jahan !Xu will soon experience withdrawal symptoms. This manifests with extreme agitation, but quickly moves on to vomiting and fever and eventually death. If there are still Jahan !Xu aboard the geodesic dome, they will not wait long for medicine to ease their suffering. After 8 intervals in the Task below, they begin ingesting the tree sap again.

CURING THE JAHAN !XU

In sickbay, the Player Characters will be able to study the neurodegenerative disease that afflicts the Jahan !Xu, and attempt to find a cure.

First, they must resolve the alien's addiction to the tree sap. The withdrawal can be deadly so this is a Timed Challenged. Each Task takes 2 intervals of time to attempt, and each interval equals two hours. The Player Characters have 10 intervals of time before the alien succumbs from heart failure due to stress cardiomyopathy. Due to the unfamiliar biology of the Jahan !Xu and the tree sap, the Complication Range is increased one level. Complications add a single interval to the Task.

- **Study the Patient**: Studying the physiology of the aliens to understand how the sap acts like an opiate in their system is a **Control + Medicine** Task with a Difficulty of 3, assisted by the ship's **Sensors + Medicine**. If the Player Characters gained Advantage by obtaining a sample of the tree sap, reduce the Difficulty by 1.

- **Find a Treatment**: Using the knowledge obtained from studying the aliens' physiology, the Player Characters may now prepare a treatment. This is a **Control** or **Reason + Medicine** Task with a Difficulty of 3, assisted by the ship's **Computers + Medicine**.

- **Administer the Treatment:** Using a hypospray, the Player Characters may now administer the treatment to ease the withdrawal symptoms and begin weaning the Jahan !Xu from their dependency. However, determining the correct dosage requires an **Insight + Medicine** Task with a Difficulty of 1. This Task Succeeds at Cost, adding two points to the Threat pool.

The Players may need to devise a more efficient method of treating the entire colony. One possible solution is to aerosolize the medication. This is a **Daring + Medicine** Task with a Difficulty of 3, assisted by the ship's **Computers + Medicine**.

Finding a cure for the neurodegenerative disease is a Linear Challenge with several Tasks that must be completed in order. The Players may wish to have more than one patient for an effective study.

- **Study the Patient:** The Player Characters must study the aliens' nervous system and brainwave patterns. This is a **Control + Medicine** Task with a Difficulty of 3, assisted by the ship's **Sensors + Medicine**. The Player Characters created Advantage if they previously studied the aliens' physiology, which reduces the Difficulty by 1. A success reduces the Difficulty of the next step by 1.

- **Study the Symptoms of the Neurodegenerative Disease:** The Player Characters must study the symptoms to understand the disease's cause. This is a **Control + Medicine** Task with a Difficulty of 3 (or 2 if the previous step was successful), assisted by the ship's **Computers + Medicine**. Successfully completing this Task allows the Players to move on to the next step. However, if there is more than one patient, then the Player Characters may perform this Task again, once on each additional patient, to gather supplementary data. Each success reduces the Difficulty of the next step by 1, to a minimum of 1.

- **Discover a Cure:** Using the knowledge obtained, Player Characters may now work on a cure. This is a **Control** or **Reason + Medicine** Task with a Difficulty of 4 (this may have been reduced if additional data was gathered in the previous step), assisted by the ship's **Computers + Medicine**.

Complications that arise from any step in this Task will increase the difficulty of the next step by 1. This represents the Player Characters misinterpreting data from laboratory results or misdiagnosing a key symptom of the condition.

THE PRIME DIRECTIVE AND COMPLICATIONS

Either before or after treating the Jahan !Xu, the Player Characters must decide on a course of action. Even if the Jahan !Xu stopped harvesting the tree sap, the damage is done. The forest is dying. Soon, the only remaining trees left alive will not be enough to maintain the dome's life support systems and other vital functions.

If the Player Characters aid the Sentient Trees, then the Albali people face forced colonization and cultural contamination. But if the Player Characters do nothing, an ancient species will go extinct, the sum of their knowledge lost. In this way, the Player Characters will have averted the resettlement of the Sentient Trees and preserved the natural evolution of the peaceful Albali, but at what cost?

Since the Albali are a pre-warp civilization, the Gamemaster should remind the Players that helping the Sentient Trees colonize the planet would be in direct violation of the Prime Directive. Encourage a robust discussion about the ethics of action or inaction.

The Gamemaster may consider using this Directive to introduce a Complication. Starfleet officers took an oath to uphold the Prime Directive with their lives if necessary. Use this belief against the Player Captain.

If the Player Captain accepts this Complication, he receives one point of Determination and reminds the crew of their oath. The Player Captain has made his decision: They will not assist the Sentient Trees in reaching Albali Prime. This will change the end of the adventure dramatically.

Should the Players choose to go against the Prime Directive, they will gain a point of Determination. Have them each take note that they have challenged this Directive, as they may suffer consequences for this action later on.

After they have debated this dilemma, here are some options the Players may consider:

FIND ANOTHER PLANET

Adhering to the Prime Directive, the Player Characters may scan for a suitable, uninhabited planet. But this remote sector of space is largely devoid of habitable worlds and time is running out for the Sentient Trees. They will in a matter of days. But the Unwavering Faith of the Sentient Trees is a Complication that makes any Persuasion Task to convince them to settle on another world impossible. To make a Persuasion Task possible, the Player Characters will need to create an Advantage by first finding a habitable world.

This is a Timed Challenge with each Task taking two intervals of time to attempt. Each interval equals 6 hours. The Player Characters have 7 intervals of time before the forest dies.

First, they must conduct a Sensor Sweep of this sector to locate a suitable planet. Even though they have spent the last month star-charting this sector and have yet to discover an M-class world, space is big – perhaps they missed something. This is a **Reason + Science** Task assisted by the ship's **Sensors + Science**, with a Difficulty of 3. The Players may make as many attempts as time with allow. Each sweep scans several parsecs within the sector. Complications add a single interval to the Task.

Momentum spends to *Obtain Information* will mean that sensors pick up a signal from Albali Prime (see Scene 3). The First Tree also detects this signal and it solidifies the Sentient Trees' belief that Albali Prime is their promised land. This is a Complication that increases the Difficulty of the Persuasion Task by 1.

While a successful Sensor Sweep eventually finds an M-class world, the Player Characters must still convince the Sentient Trees to abandon their plans to colonize Albali Prime. Use the appropriate Attribute + Discipline combination that best suits the approach of the Player Characters. For example, a **Reason + Command** should be used for those who wish to find a solution through diplomacy. If the Players wish to impress upon the Sentient Trees the ramifications colonization might have on the Albali, **Presence + Security** might be appropriate. Regardless of the combination, the Difficulty of this Persuasion Task is 5. If the Complication from the signal from Albali Prime increases this Difficulty to 6, then the Task becomes impossible.

If the Persuasion Task fails, or becomes impossible, the First Tree says:

"Our promised land is where we are meant to go. I will get my people there or I will die trying. I will expend all of my life's energy to ensure some of them survive."

VISIT ALBALI PRIME

The Player Characters may decide to leave the geodesic dome and travel to Albali Prime with the intention of locating an out-of-the-way place for the forest to colonize. Proceed to Scene 3.

TRANSFERRING POWER TO THE GEODESIC DOME

The Player Characters may decide to help the geodesic dome reach Albali Prime or some other suitable world before the forest dies. This might be accomplished by transferring power from the Player Characters' ship to the geodesic dome. This speeds the Sentient Tree's repair cycle, enabling them to fix their propulsion system with enough power to travel at warp 2. This enables them to reach Albali Prime in just 17 hours.

The Players would need to beam several of their ship's batteries to the geodesic dome and connect them to a seedpod's bioelectric interface. This is a **Daring + Engineering** Task with a Difficulty of 4. A Complication here might result in the Players transferring too much power too quickly. The battery overloads, causing a fire.

ALBALI [MINOR NPC]

TRAITS: Albalin

ATTRIBUTES

CONTROL 08	FITNESS 09	PRESENCE 09
DARING 08	INSIGHT 07	REASON 07

DISCIPLINES

COMMAND 02	SECURITY 00	SCIENCE 01
CONN 00	ENGINEERING 02	MEDICINE 01

STRESS: 9 **RESISTANCE:** 0

WEAPONS:

- Simple Tools (Melee, 2, Knockdown)

SCENE 3: BEACON FROM THE PLANET

If the Player Characters' starship is in orbit around Albali Prime, then they detect a faint beacon transmitting at random intervals from the surface. If the Player Characters have not left the geodesic dome, then their long-range sensors will eventually detect the beacon. Before they can get an exact fix on its location, the beacon stops transmitting. This goes against everything in the planetary survey report, which is only 10 years old. The technology required to transmit the signal could not have been invented by the native inhabitants. Is it an alien probe that fell to the surface of the planet or something else? Either way, the survey team missed something. If the Player Characters are not already in orbit, they will probably want to investigate.

Scanning the planet surface is a **Reason + Science** Task, assisted by the ship's **Sensors + Science**, with a Difficulty of 0. Success reveals:

- No obvious uninhabited continent for the Sentient Trees to settle.
- A sparsely populated valley nestled between two mountain ranges. 1,132 humanoids inhabit the valley, spread across 1,000 square kilometers. The valley is barren of trees. Only bushes and bamboo-like plants grow here, despite fertile soil and ample water from rivers, streams, and small lakes. The inhabitants practice agriculture, along with foraging and hunting in the mountains.

Spending Momentum to *Obtain Information* reveals:

- The beacon came from somewhere in this valley. The beacon will not transmit again, making it impossible to pinpoint precise coordinates.

At this point, the Player Characters might send a landing party to the valley to investigate. The planet is protected by the Prime Directive so the Player Characters should proceed with caution. They are to avoid any interference with the normal social development of the Albali. To blend in with the inhabitants, ship's stores should provide native costumes.

Whatever the Player Characters do, they will need to work quickly. Time will either be running out for the Sentient Trees or the geodesic dome will be speeding toward the planet and will soon arrive – whether the Player Characters are ready or not.

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A FOREST APART
ACT 3: TO THE RUINS

SCENE 1: SEARCH FOR THE BEACON

Finding the beacon – and determining its origin – is essential to understanding the relationship between the Sentient Trees and Albali Prime. The information the Player Characters gain may reinforce the choices they have made about aiding the Sentient Trees or lead them to shift their thinking. Locating the beacon will not be easy, as it only transmits sporadically – sometimes years between transmissions. The Player Characters will need to interact with the inhabitants of the valley if they hope to find the beacon. But to avoid violating the Prime Directive, they will need to be careful to not divulge anything about space travel or advanced technology.

IN THE VALLEY

The landing party materializes in a lush valley ringed by snow-topped mountains. Scans detect a structure on the other side of a rise, less than half a kilometer away. The rise provides a commanding a view of the structure below.

The building is a rammed earth and stone roundhouse with a thatched conical roof. Nearby, on a large flat stone that juts into the clear waters of a glacial lake, a man washes clothes. A woman tends a patch of bright red, bamboo-like plants. She sees the Player Characters, puts down her clay watering pail, and waves to the Player Characters.

As the Player Characters approach, the man lays the wet clothes on the stone to dry in the sun. The woman greets them with a smile:

"*I am the one called Narapol, of the two called Nara and Pol. And this is my partner, the one called Balfourwin, of the two called Fourwin and Bal. They are gone now but not gone. In here, we keep them.*" She places a palm over her heart, and Balfourwin stands to join her. "*Our home is your home. Come. Are you here for the Library?*"

- The Library is a female who recounts the stories of their people for those who have come of age. It is a seasonal gathering, initiating their young into the story trade. Even those without children attend.

Inside, a fire pit roars in the center of the roundhouse. Benches made from the bamboo-like plants line the white stone walls. The beams supporting the thatched roof are also constructed from this plant. Curtains drape over two sleeping cots for privacy.

Balfourwin calls for his daughter and the young girl peeks out from behind one of the curtains. He introduces her as Narabal and tells her he is making tea for the trade. She runs out and sits beside the fire, staring wide-eyed at the Player Characters.

- In the traditions of the Albali, the guests tell a story while the tea brews. The tale can be about their travels or their family history. It can even be of a fantastical nature. Regardless, the goal is to influence and inspire the listener. This is a **Presence + Command** Task with a Difficulty of 2. Success creates Advantage in Scene 2 during their interaction with the Library while failure Succeeds at Cost, creating a Complication in that scene.

When the Players Characters have told their story, Balfourwin pours the tea and his wife tells a tale of a lost forest – the mythology many in the valley share.

"*In a time before this one, beyond living memory, a forest grew in this valley from mountain to mountain. The forest gave our people all they needed, sweet fruit to eat, cool shade from the two suns, limbs to climb and cradle us. But our ancestors forgot their love of that forest. They sought only to serve themselves. They thought themselves above the world, not part of it. And their arrogance almost destroyed us all. Many died in the great catastrophe and in the years of sorrow that followed. But in our tales of remembrance, we relearned what our ancestors forgot. Care for the land and the land will care for you, and keep you always.*"

At the end of the telling, the little girl says, "*I can take you to the cave. The story is there. I can show you.*"

PLANETARY SURVEY REPORT EXCERPT

The Albali are human in appearance. Both men and women wear simple knee-length woollen wraps with a single shoulder strap. They are an affable people, ever curious and always welcoming of strangers from distant lands. There is no history of violence among them. Never has one settlement taken up arms against another. They use a barter system and their most valuable commodity is stories. They take pleasure in trading stories, the better the tale the more valuable the exchange. In fact, it is customary to greet newcomers with such a trade.

- Lieutenant Cristobal Hensley

Balfourwin chides his daughter, saying, "*It's a myth, little sprout*." And to his wife, he says, "*The girl must understand the difference between what is true and what is imagined*."

"*Faith is not imagined, husband*." Narapol says. "*Go on, my daughter, show them. There is still time before the Library begins. We will meet you there.*"

Narabal leads the Player Characters to the far side of the glacial lake, to a cave in the hills.

SCENE 2: LOST CIVILIZATION

Inside the cave, luminescent moss dispels the darkness. The Player Characters follow Narabal through twisting underground passages to a massive chamber. Among quartzite columns and petroglyphs rests a half-buried seedpod. Composed of metal and organic material, the teardrop-shaped seedpod is a meter tall. Living roots extend from the bottom and into nearby pools of water. A delicate seedling – a red-leafed tree – is visible through a small window.

On the chamber's walls, petroglyphs depict a vast forest. Narabal points to the carvings and says: "*This is the empty valley before it emptied."*

She then points out the seedpod. "*The stories say it sings a beautiful melody. The Library heard it once, long ago. I have sat here many cycles of the suns, hoping to hear its song. Do you think it will ever sing for me?*"

An analysis of the seedpod requires the use of a tricorder. This is a **Reason + Science** Task, with a Difficulty of 3. Alternatively, they can use **Insight + Engineering**. Ask the Players how they manage to do this without Narabal seeing or hearing the tricorder. Success reveals:

- The seedpod is a biomechanical transmitter.
- It is approximately 10,000 years old.

Spending Momentum to *Obtain Information* reveals, point for point:

- The device is not alien to Albali Prime. Its biology is comparable to the planet's other plant and animal life.
- The organic elements show evidence of antibodies to a weaponized biological agent.

If the Player Characters analyzed the mummified remains within the sarcophagus on the geodesic dome, then the tricorder still retains that data. It registers similarities between the biology of the seedpod and the remains: both share the same DNA codes for processing sugars. The deceased humanoid came from Albali Prime.

If the Player Characters did not analyze the remains aboard the geodesic dome they may still make this discovery. The tricorder will register faint similarities between the seedpod and their analysis of the First Tree. But they will need to send the results to their vessel to run further tests in the lab. This is a **Reason + Science** Task assisted by the ship's **Computers + Science**, with a Difficulty of 2. Success isolates the common DNA shared between the seedpod and the First Tree – it is Albali DNA. The Sentient Trees are a blending of the two species, a humanoid from Albali Prime and a botanical lifeform from another galaxy.

What happens next will largely be determined by the Player Characters' choices so far:

- If the Players helped the Sentient Trees, then the geodesic dome is arriving imminently. They must prepare the Albali, ensuring they are not simply being colonized by this alien species. See **The Library**.
- If the Players did not help the Sentient Trees, then after this discovery they may decide that the Prime Directive doesn't apply under these circumstances. It will be a race against time to aid the Sentient Trees before it is too late. See **Alternative Ending**. Regardless, the Players will still need to grapple with the impending settlement, as per above.

THE LIBRARY

The Library arrives soon after the Player Characters make their discovery. She is an old, wizened woman with a bamboo walking cane. She takes a seat on a stone beside the seedpod. Children and their parents file into the cave, sitting in a circle around her. Narabal's parents arrive and join their daughter.

The Library's creaking voice echoes in the cave. *"My children, you are here for the great truth. You are the seedlings that will carry our stories to the next generation. Are you ready?"*

The children murmur their eager agreement. The Library continues:

"Long ago, our ancestors foresaw the coming of the great cataclysm. They foresaw the end of the forest. So they sent away the last surviving trees, with the faithful to care for them. They hoped one day we could make our valley worthy again of such a gift. This seedling reminds us of our destiny. If the day comes when the forest grows once more, we must not forget our place in the order of things. This is why we keep our stories close. To see where we are going, we must first understand where we have been."

The Library asks each child to share the story they have prepared. The stories range from the mundane – the season's

planting and harvest – to the deeply personal – tales of loss and sadness. When it is Narabal's turn, she tells of the strangers coming to her homestead.

The Library then turns to the Player Characters and asks them why they have come. The Player Characters may use this moment to address the people and pave the way for the arrival of the Sentient Trees. Though many of the people would embrace the Sentient Trees, many, like Narabal's father, are skeptical of the old tales. Convincing the people will be a Difficulty 3 Persuasion Task.

- If the Players created a relationship Advantage in the previous scene, it will cancel one Complication.
- If the Players Succeeded at Cost in the previous scene and thus created a Complication, the Difficulty of the Persuasion Task increases by 1. This represents Narabal's father speaking out against believing in superstition and myth, and inspiring others to do so as well. "*These are stories to teach us how to live a good life, nothing more*."
- If the Players did not create this Complication, spend 2 Threat and create the Complication anyway.

This Task Succeeds at Cost, creating a Complication in the form of a negative personal Trait for the Library. A majority of the people may be swayed but the Library has the final say and she needs further convincing. She questions the honesty of the Player Characters. *"We have rejected many a false promise. Traders from beyond the valley have come, offering worthless seeds. How do we know that your trees are any different?"*

Convincing the Library is a Difficulty 3 Persuasion Task. Her Questioning Trait, however, increases the Difficulty by 1. If the Players generated their own Complication by rolling a 20, then the Questioning Trait counts as two Traits, increasing the Difficulty by 2. If this occurs, the Players may want to spend any Momentum generated, even buying additional dice with Threat to ensure a chance at success.

But the Players will need to alter the circumstances in some way. The best approach might to provide the Library with evidence that what they claim is true. Each fact will reduce the Difficulty of the Persuasion Task by 1. But how much about themselves are they willing to reveal? How much of the truth will they tell? Will they violate the Prime Directive and expose the Albali to the notions of space travel and extra-terrestrial life?

At this moment, if the Player Characters had helped the Sentient Trees, the seedpod sputters into song as the geodesic dome drops out of warp above Albali Prime. The seedpod has made music before, but not for many years and then only for a few minutes. This time, the song is continuous. This further reduces the Difficulty of the Persuasion Task by 1, to a minimum of 1.

If this Task fails, the people begin arguing among themselves – divided over whether to believe these strangers. Make a note of this, as it will affect the outcome of the first meeting between the Sentient Trees and the Albali.

SCENE 3: THE FOREST ARRIVES

The Player Characters' ship notifies the landing party that the geodesic dome has appeared above Albali Prime and is now making its descent into the atmosphere. The large tapering roots of the dome's underbelly burn away in the extreme heat. Setting down in an open stretch of fields, the translucent dome dissolves into a water vapor and dissipates in the air. The hexagonal vines, burnt to a crisp, fall to the forest floor. The roots of the trees burrow deep and settle into their new soil.

The flowers sing. The Gardeners emerge from their seedpods and begin their work. The Interface emerges from the forest before the Player Characters and the Albali. Note that, if the Interface did not remain in the geodesic dome, an irresistible urge will have called them to beam down to the planet's surface to reunite with the Sentient Trees.

If the Player Characters were successful at convincing the Albali to welcome the Sentient Trees, then the First Tree will address the people of the valley through the Interface.

"This alien yet familiar soil has awakened ancient memories within us. Millennia ago, your people journeyed among the stars. One of them, an astronaut, woke us to consciousness. He is within me, even now, and so he is a part of all of us. He came from this valley. He carried its memory across galaxies. He taught us about the people who lived here, who loved their forest like they loved their children. When our own world died, this love called us here.

"There are too few of us left to be called a forest but with your tender care we may yet survive. If you welcome us, care of us in our time of need, if you let us thrive and flourish, we will provide you shade and fruit. It has been so long, so very long since your kind sat beneath our branches in peace. Let your little ones climb upon our limbs as they would your backs, and we will cradle them always."

If the Player Characters were not successful at convincing the Albali, then the sight of the geodesic dome falling from the sky and the vine-like Gardeners frightens them to the point of forgetting themselves. Armed only with farm implements, some move to attack. While they may be easily subdued with phaser fire, the real challenge for the Players will be stopping the combat and reasoning with them. The

THE FATE OF THE JAHAN !XU

If the Player Characters were successful in treating the Jahan !Xu's addiction and finding a cure for their neurodegenerative disease, they will ask to be taken to the nearest asteroid field. This mission could serve as a catalyst for the Players' next adventure.

If the Player Characters were not successful in finding a cure for the disease, they may need to find a way for the Sentient Trees and the Jahan !Xu to exist in a state of symbiosis. The Gamemaster should encourage the Players to be creative here. For example, the Albali may serve as the bridge between the species: harvesting sap in a way that does not harm the Sentient Trees but still slows the progression of the Jahan !Xu's disease.

THE FATE OF THE INTERFACE

Whether a Player Character or Supporting Character, the Gamemaster should encourage the Players to explore how the Interface has been affected by the experience of being one with the forest. Medical scans may show that the officer is slowly becoming an entirely unique entity. Does the character wish to return to live as a completely non-botanical life form, or do they wish to further explore this new way of being? Like Willard Decker joining with V'ger in *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*, the officer may be drawn to give up their Starfleet commission and follow a new path as a part of the forest.

If the Interface opts to continue their Starfleet career, this requires surgery. Treat the medical procedure as an Extended Task with a Work track of 10, a Magnitude of 4 and a Base Difficulty of 4. The Basic Task is **Control + Medicine**, assisted by the ship's **Computers + Medicine**. The consequences of failure may be severe injuries resulting from nerve damage. Regardless of success or failure, the patient suffers emotional distress. He or she will feel a profound sense of loss, as if a part of them is missing.

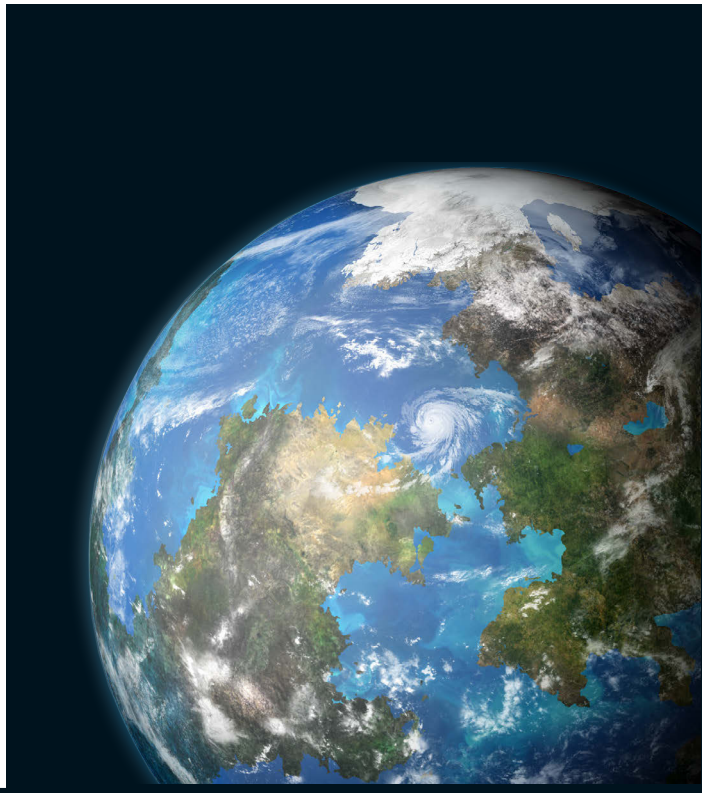
If the Sentient Trees have perished, the fate of the Interface is more uncertain. The pain of such a great loss may break even the strongest mind. Even if the medical procedure is a success, the officer may never be the same again.

If the Player Character has already received two or more Spotlight Milestones, then this could be an opportunity to award an Arc Milestone since it represents a major change for the character.

arrival of the Sentient Trees has changed the circumstances for the Player Characters and they can make another attempt to convince the Albali. This is a Difficulty 3 Persuasion Task. If the Player Characters created a relationship Advantage at the roundhouse in Scene 1, the Difficulty is reduced by 1. This represents Narabal and her mother aiding the Player Characters' arguments.

- If they are successful, Narabal will step forward from the crowd. *"This is not our way,"* she says. *"We greet strangers with tea and story-trade. I would like to hear the forest's story."* Her words still her people's fears and the Interface speaks as above.

- If they are not successful, the Sentient Trees will recognize that they are not wanted. The genetic memory of how the forests of their home world were once abused by non-botanicals is strong. They would rather perish than condemn their seedlings to such a life. The Interface says: *"We will not burden you with our existence."* The remaining living Sentient Trees then wither before their very eyes, until they are nothing but dead, petrified wood. The Interface collapses, the link broken. See **The Fate of the Interface** sidebar.



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A FOREST APART
CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this adventure will feel very different depending on the Player Characters' choices. If they successfully helped the Sentient Trees or their seeds to join in peaceful coexistence with the Albali, and aided the Jahan !Xu, then the Player Characters may feel a sense of uneasy triumph. They have saved one or more sentient species from extinction, but potentially violated the Prime Directive. Have they done the right thing? Was it worth it? Gamemasters should take this into consideration when determining Reputation and possible disciplinary actions.

CONTINUING VOYAGES...

If the Player Characters did not succeed in aiding the Sentient Trees or the Jahan !Xu, or even both, they will need to grapple with their role in failing to prevent the extinction of sentient species. They may have followed the Prime Directive, but at what cost? How will this affect the morale of the crew on future missions?

ALTERNATIVE ENDING

If the Player Characters did not aid the Sentient Trees by providing additional power for the dome's propulsion, their experiences on Albali Prime may change their minds. If so, they find the geodesic dome adrift and the forest dying. Scattered on the ground around the First Tree are several large, acorn-like golden seeds. Through the Interface, the First Tree speaks: "*We are lost. But if you take these seeds and plant them in good soil, then our people may live on*." The Interface then goes on to reveal the story of the Ancient Astronaut. At this stage, all tricorder readings and other analysis make it clear that the forest cannot be saved. The seeds – and the future of the Sentient Trees – now rest in the Player Characters' hands. They can return to Albali Prime with the seeds or find another suitable planet that is uninhabited.